

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 06445 01 OF 02 131332Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----093904 131347Z /40

O P 131233Z OCT 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5212
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 6445

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PGOB, SY, LE, IS, US
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON CEASEFIRE

REF: STATE 245543

1. SUMMARY:
FONMIN KHADDAM AVERS PLO/FATAH FULLY COMMITTED TO
IMPLEMENTATION OF SHTAURA AGREEMENT. ACCUSES ISRAEL OF
LATEST ESCALATION WHICH HE SEES AIMED AT MAINTAINING
INSTABILITY OF BORDER AREA AND DISCREDITING U.S. EFFORTS
IN PEACE PROCESS. CAUTIONED HIM THAT WHEREVEER THE FACTS LIE
IN PRESENT CRISIS, ISRAEL IS VERY WORKED UP OVER BORDER
SITUATION AND WE HOPE WYRIANS WILL DO EVERYTHING THEY
CAN BEHIND SCENES TO CALM SITUATION. END SUMMARY

2. MET WITH FONMIN KHADDAM MORNING OCTOBER 13 TO DISCUSS
SOUTH LEBANON CEASE-FIRE AS INSTRUCTED PARA 3 REFTEL.

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SECRET

PAGE 02 DAMASC 06445 01 OF 02 131332Z

SAC
THAT ISRAELIS WERE SHOWING INTENSE CONCERN OVER
ESCALATION OF MILITARY INCIDENTS DURING PAST FEW DAYS.
WE ARE COUNSELING RESTRAINT ON THE ISRAELIS BUT, AS I HAD
MADE CLEAR TO FONMIN IN PAST, WE ARE UNABLE TO ABAOULUTLY
GUARANTEE ISRAELIS WILL NOT RETALIATE IN A SPECIFIC MILITARY
SITUATION.

3. KHADDAM STATED THAT, ACCORDING TO SYRIA'S INFORMATION, THE LATEST ESCALATION HAD BEEN TRIGGERED BY ISRAELI SHELLING OF NABATIYEH AND OTHER SITES. PALESTINIAN SIDE HAD NOT ORIGINATED THE ATTACK. ISRAEL, FONMIN EMPHASIZED, "CLEARLY WANTS NO SOLUTION OF THE SHUTH LEBANON PROBLEM AND, UNDER THE SLOGAN OF PROTECTING CERTAIN LEBANESE FRACTIONS, IS TRYING TO UNDERMINE THE AUTHORITY OF THE LEBANESE STATE."

4. KHADDAM SAID THAT TWO DAYS AGO PLO LEADER SHALAH KHALAF (ABU IYAD) HAD ASSURED SYRIANS IN DAMASCUS THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF SHTAURA AGREEMENT WAS UNDERWAY. HE HAD ALREADY SENT A NUMBER OF REGULAR MILITARY PERSONNEL. KHALAF FURTHER ADVISED DAMASCUS THAT PLO/FATAH HAD AGREED WITH SARKIS TO START WITHDRAWAL OF PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS EITHER THIS FRIDAY (TOMORROW) OR SATURDAY. "APPARENTLY", KHADDAM CONTINUED, "WHEN ISRAEL REALIZED PALESTINIANS WERE SERIOUS ABOUT IMPLEMENTING THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT, THAT TRIGGERED OFF LATEST MILITARY EXCHANGES."

5. ASKED WHERE KHALAF HAD INDICATED PLO/FATAH HAD DECIDED TO BEGIN WITHDRAWAL OPERATIONS. KHADDAM REPLIED HE DID NOT HAVE THAT MUCH DETAIL. THIS WAS A MATTER BETWEEN THE PALESTINIANS AND THE LEBANESE. THE MAPS AND ALL SUCH DETAILS WERE IN GOL HANDS.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 DAMASC 06445 01 OF 02 131332Z

YM I NOTED THAT WEIZMAN HAD CANCELED MEETING BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND LEBANESE SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER 12, DESCRIBING SITUATION AS "TOO VOLATILE" TO CONDUCT DISCUSSIONS. KHADDAM REPLIED CALMLY, WE WERE WITNESSING AN "ISRAELI THEATRICAL," WITH A SCENARIO DESIGNED TO DENY RETURN OF STABILITY TO SOUTH LEBANON. SAID HE WAS PERSONALLY PERSUADED THE ISRAELIS STILL INTENDED EXTEND ISRAELI SOVEREIGNTY NORTH OF THE PRESENT BORDER. CONTINUED INSTABILITY OF LIVEING CONDITIONS MEANT MORE AND MORE LEBANESE CITIXENS IN BORDER AREA WOULD DECIDE TO EVACUATE THEIR HOMES PERMANENTLY.

7. ASKED HIS ASSESSMENT OF PLO/FATAH COMMITMENT TO THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT, KHADDAM REPLIED THAT IT WAS STRONG AND UNCHANGED. FATAH, HE ADDED, "IS ABLE TO CONTROL THE REJECTIONIST FRONT AND HAS BEEN DOING SO IN THE SOUTH." FLO/FATAH DETERMINATION TO RESPECT SHTAURA AGREEMENT IS BEYOND QUESTION. NOTED KHALAF ALSO ADVISED SYRIANS HE HAD INFORMED SARKIS THAT PLO/FATAH HAD WORKED OUT AGREEMENT WITH CERTAIN LEBANESE FEFTIST (UNIDENTIFIED) HAVING MILITARY ELEMENTS IN THE SOURTH THAT LATTER WOULD WITHDRAW

THEIR FIGHTERS, DESPITE FACT ALL INVOLVED WERE LEBANESE
CITIZENS.

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 06445 02 OF 02 131344Z
ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 6445
EXDIS

8. I RECALLED KHADDAM'S COMMENTS IN AN EARLIER DISCUSSION OF SOUTH
LEBANON, THAT THERE WERE A FEW PALESTINIAN TROUBLEMAKERS IN THE
SOUTH WHO COULD NOT BE BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL. SAID I FOUND IT ENCOURA-
GING
THAT HE FELT ABLE TODAY TO ASSURE ME SO CATEGORICALLY
THAT PLO/FATAH WAS IN COMPLEE CONTROL OF ALL PALESTINIAN
FIGHTERS. SPEAKING IN ARABIC, HE REJOINED THAT "FATAH,
SAIQA AND THE PDFLP" WREE ABLE TO MAINTAIN
FULL CONTROL OVER THE PALESTINIAN FIGHTERS. HE THEN TOLD
HIS INTERPRETER NOT TO REFER TO THE SPECIFIC GROUPS IN THE
WRITTEN TRANSCRIPT AND JUST TO RECORD THE "PLO IS IN COMPLETE CONTROL."

HE ADDED, THE VERY FACT THAT LEBANESE OFFICERS HAVE
ARRIVED IN THE SOUTH TO TAKE UP THEIR POSITIONS
INDICATES PLO-GOL COOPERATION AND THE PLO'S
TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT.

9. KHADDAM CONCLUDED THAT HE KNEW USG RECOGNIZED
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BORDER AREA
AND THE GENERAL MIDDLE EAST SITUATION. ISRAEL, HE ARGUED,
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 06445 02 OF 02 131344Z

WISHES TO MAKE THE USG APPEAR IMMOBILIZED; THIS WOULD CAUSE ARABS TO LOSE CONFIDENCE IN THE AMERICAN CAPACITY TO MAKE TANGIBLE PROGRESS IN THE PEACE PROCESS. CURRENT ISRAELI ACTIVITY IS SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED AGAINST PRESIDENT CARTER. I THANKED HIM FOR HIS PRESENTATION AND TOOK LEAVE ON CAUTIONALY NOTE THAT WHEREVER THE FACTS LIE IN PRESENT CRISIS, ISRAELIS, IN PARTICULAR DEFMIN WEIZMAN, WERE SPEAKING IN TONE OF EXTREME IRRITATION OVER BORDER SITUATION AND WE HOPED THE SYRIANS WILL DO EVERYTHING THEY CAN BEHIND THE SCENES TO CALM THE SITUATION. HE MADE NO RESPONSE.

10. PRESIDENCY HAS PROMISED ARRANGE APPPOINTMENT WITH COS HIKMAT SHIHABI TO DISCUSS MILITARY SITUATION IN BORDER AREA IN MORE DETAIL. THIS APPOINTMENT MAY TAKE PLACE LATER TODAY, BUT IN VIEW SHIHABI'S INVOLVEMENT WITH VISIT HERE OF SAUDI NATIONAL GUARD COMMANDER, PRINCE ABFULLAH, WAS TOLD TIMING OF APPOINTMENT COULD NOT BE GUARANTEED.

11. COMMENT:
KHADDAM'S DISAVOWAL OF ANY PALESTINIAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR LATEST INCIDENTS WAS ON PAT SIDE AND SUSCEPTIBLE OF BEING DISMISSED AS SELF-SERVING ANTI-ISRAELI POSTURING.
WISH ONLY RECORD IT WAS DELIVERED WITH NON-POLEMICAL SOLEMNITY UNUSUAL FOR THE FONMIN. HIS FLAT AFFIRMATION OF PLO/FATAH ABILITY TO CONTROL ALL PALESTINIAN FIGHTERS IN SOUTH MAY COME BACK TO HAUNT HIM IN FUTURE INCIDENTS OCCUR. IT ALSO NOTEWORTHY THAT HIS APPARENT SLIP OF THE TONGUE IN LISTING SAIQA AS AMONG KEY ELEMENTS WORKING FOR SHTAURA AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION, IN EFFECT LINKS SYRIA WITH FATAH IN SUPPORTING SHTAURA IMPLEMENTATION.

I CANNOT EXPLAIN WHY HE DID NOT WANT THIS SPECIFIC IN THE RECORD OF OUR MEETING.

MURPHY
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 06445 02 OF 02 131344Z

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